

# R2R: Taking research from its roots to an accessible reality

Science often has the stereotype of being a boring, complicated subject that the lay audience are not interested in. However, this could not be further from the truth. The public have an insatiable appetite for science that is not being fulfilled by the methods currently used to publish research. Something needs to change. Fortunately, organisations like *Research2Reality* in Canada have recognised that, sparking an open access movement to make science more approachable. We sat down with their founders – **Mike MacMillan** and **Molly Shoichet** – to find out more.

**T**he time for open access is here and now. For far too long, the general public's ability to access and interpret scientific research has been somewhat limited by traditional scholarly publishing methods. Paywalls put up by for-profit publishers have ensured that research has remained in circles confined only to science, leaving the lay audience's appetite for research somewhat unfulfilled.

But now, organisations like *Research2Reality* (R2R) are breaking these paywalls down, enabling the public to access the research their tax-paying money largely funds.

R2R operate mainly in Canada, where they utilise modern-day media platforms to engage a wider audience. Through their videos and educational materials, R2R continuously engage a younger, more varied audience to appreciate the real side of science – making research something to be enjoyed rather than bored by.

We spoke to their founders – Mike MacMillan and Molly Shoichet – to find out more about

R2R's ground breaking work and to gather their views on why an open access movement is so important.

*Hello Mike and Molly! Can you tell us about Research2Reality (R2R) as founding partners in terms of its core principles, background/heritage and aims?*

We would like to hope that seeing research as critical to the future of the world is undisputable. At its core, everyone has a vested interest in the work being done in labs around the globe. In Canada, we were convinced that researchers only discussed science amongst themselves, rather than communicating with the public about the work being done, the advances they're making, and how this will affect the average person's life. *Research2Reality* (R2R) was born in this space, with an aim to increase awareness into Canadian research and its impact on your life.

R2R shines a spotlight on world-class scientists engaged in innovative & leading-edge Canadian research. We celebrate the success and impact of researchers who are currently shaping the new frontiers of science. ▶

**Research2Reality's mandate is to disseminate knowledge such that people can make informed decisions vs. emotional ones**



*R2R content is free-to-access – why is this important and what are your thoughts on both the open access and open science movements?*

Our goal at R2R is to offer the public some insight into the incredible research that is shaping their future. We believe that by engaging the public in these conversations, they will be more invested in the outcomes. This will, in turn, give them greater ownership of their future.

The innovation economy is our future and we need the workforce to be successful in this economy. R2R begins the conversation, bringing people together to address the biggest challenges faced by humanity. We are a not-for-profit organisation, and our mandate is to disseminate knowledge such that people can make informed decisions vs. emotional ones. It is important to provide equal access for everyone.

*How has R2R fulfilled its aims to enhance Canada's brand as a leader in innovation, reinforce the importance of continued investment in advanced research and enhance scientific literacy? Are you unique or are there other similar organisations working towards the same goal?*

Canada's brand as an innovative nation is growing. We can see this through increased investment in artificial intelligence, regenerative medicine, alternative energy and health-related companies. Our goal is to enhance this reputation further and it is for this reason that we have a partnership model that enables effective collaboration. We work together with our partners in government and academia, and we are always looking for more partners in all sectors of our economy.

There are other organisations making a difference as well of course. For instance, Let's Talk Science is one example of this – effective at bringing research into high school classrooms. Our Science centres meanwhile are effective at engaging curious kids.

R2R is unique in its use of film to tell compelling stories. Most organisations are focused on school age youth. R2R extends beyond high school to young adults and beyond.

*Globally, more and more people are taking advantage of high-speed internet to watch videos and interact with content, rather than sticking to the traditional static publishing. How does R2R's videos/orange chair sessions*



Left: Mike MacMillan and Molly Shoichet took time to pose for the camera on a recent shoot at the University of Toronto.  
Right: Research2Reality team members – Alison Guy, Karyn Ho and Alina Kelly – celebrate R2R's launch.

*present complex research/topics and make it more accessible to non-specialists?*

Using video as a medium for engagement and education is ideal. It allows us to edit stories into digestible chunks that can present complex ideas in a tight timeline – say 90 seconds as a target. It also allows us to bring the public into the world of research laboratories. Bringing that work to life, seeing researchers in action helps to demystify the process. It also demystifies the stereotype of what a scientist looks or acts like – it puts a human face to science.

Video also has significant engagement in a social media space. It's a great way to get information out to the masses while also opening the doors to our country's best and most promising research centres.

*How have researchers and the public responded to this initiative? Do you feel*

**Canadians are curious to know more about scientific research, so it is a good time for Research2Reality to tell them these stories**



*R2R is helping to bridge the gap between researchers and the public?*

Yes, we have been gaining momentum in our outreach efforts. We use social media tools like Facebook and Twitter to reach our audience and are looking at other tools, like Instagram to enhance our reach. We now have five million Facebook impressions, and over 54,000 YouTube minutes watched. Some of our videos have even now had over 100,000 views, so we are making an impact. We are excited about our progress to date and know that we can achieve more by honing our message and bringing together more partners.

*R2R is a public outreach effort that currently features basic research from six Canadian universities – are you looking to expand this number further in the future?*

We are always growing our base and building partnerships. We have a new partnership with



a leading publisher of educational materials. We have started work with several foundations and are in the midst of fundraising a project for Inspiring Women in STEM, developed with the Canadian Association of Science Centres and Ingenium – the new face of Canada's Science Centres of Innovation. We look for private and public partners, institutions, governments – basically anyone who shares our clear ambition to make research accessible, sharing stories about the best science in Canada.

*Clearly R2R has great support from some major Canadian Universities and organisations – what strategies are you initiating to gain further support from more organisations across Canada?*

R2R is consistently reaching out to new partners in the public and private sectors. As our brand grows, it will be easier to bring on new partners.

However, without Federal funding, we have a pay-to-play model. This brings challenges along with it, in that not everyone wants to pay to play. But everyone does acknowledge the superb quality of our product.

*Although, R2R is solely focused on presenting research from leading Canadian*

*researchers, is there a possibility to branch out to more countries or is this not an avenue that you wish to pursue?*

Yes! In working with one of our partners – CIFAR – we have already started working with international scientists, specifically those who collaborate with Canadian researchers, foundations, and institutions.

For now – we are focused on Canada. But there is certainly an interest on our team to include the work being done in labs around the world, tracking the impact of that research in Canada as well as promoting a better understanding of Canada's contribution to science on the global stage.

Clearly, most of the world doesn't understand about leading research in their own countries either. According to a recent poll, 82% of Canadians are curious to know more about scientific research, so it is a good time for R2R to tell them these stories.

*What does the future hold for R2R?*

The sky is the limit! We just want to make sure we are getting great research stories out into the world and helping people better understand that the work done in those labs has a massive impact. This impact doesn't only affect our health, economy, technology,

and innovation – it also affects how we live our lives.

• For further information about Research2Reality, please visit their website at [www.research2reality.com](http://www.research2reality.com) and follow them on Twitter @r2rnow.



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